

Security Council Open Debate on Children in Armed Conflict, June 17th 2013, Security Council Chamber

Statement by Ms. Zerrougui, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

I would like to begin by thanking the United Kingdom presidency of the Council and the Luxembourg chairmanship of the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict for holding this important debate on children and armed conflict.

Council members have before them the twelfth annual report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (S/2013/245). The report reflects developments from January to December 2012 and relevant updates. Although the reporting period saw marked progress, especially in relation to dialogue with parties to conflict and action plans, disturbing new trends and concerns for children have also arisen. As new conflicts emerged or deepened in the course of the past 18 months, children continued to pay a heavy toll — perhaps the heaviest. The evolving nature and tactics of armed conflict have created unprecedented threats for children. The absence of clear front lines and identifiable opponents, and the increasing use of terror tactics have made children more vulnerable. I would also like to highlight the fact that, as in previous years, non-State armed groups constitute the vast majority of listed parties. They account for 46 of the 55 perpetrators listed in the annexes. In addition, I would like to highlight that half of the parties listed are so-called persistent perpetrators, meaning that they have been on the list for five years or more. I welcome the efforts of the Working Group to devise innovative ways to address this issue, and I look forward to the outcome of these discussions.

In Mali, which has been included in the report for the first time, children were recruited by all armed groups active in the north. We also received information that boys and girls were associated with pro-Government militias in performing various tasks, including participation in combat. As the country is transitioning towards stabilization, it is crucial to ensure that no children are integrated into the regular armed forces or forgotten in the reintegration process, and that measures to prevent the recruitment of children be put in place. On the other hand, we continue to receive worrisome information on children being detained by the Malian security forces for alleged association with armed groups, as well as children hiding in their communities in fear of being arrested for association with armed groups. I call upon the Malian authorities to treat such children in line with international norms and standards.

In addition, accountability for all other violations committed in Mali, such as attacks on schools and hospitals, the killing and maiming of children and sexual violence, needs to be sought as a matter of priority. The international community has an important role to play to assist the Malian authorities in that crucial endeavour. I also wish to call upon all stakeholders to ensure that in the context of the ongoing peace talks in Ouagadougou, the needs and best interests of children are adequately taken into account.

The conflict in the Central African Republic has also had a disproportionate impact on children. In a country where children have been deprived of a normal life for so many years, it is particularly alarming to see that two thirds of the children separated from armed groups in 2012 were re-recruited by the Séléka coalition at the beginning of 2013.

Many children were killed and injured during the clashes in Bangui in April 2013. Children continue to be affected by the ongoing insecurity and the lack of humanitarian access. More than 2 million children in the Central African Republic lack basic services, and hundreds of thousands lack access to education. Those children have suffered from repeated violations for too long, and it is now time to consider what further action, including targeted measures, should be taken against perpetrators to enhance protection and justice for children. I also call upon all relevant stakeholders to ensure that child protection remains central to ongoing discussions around the implementation of the Libreville Agreement in the Central African Republic.

It has been two years since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, yet we are no closer to saving the lives of children. As the conflict rages on, it affects me deeply that grave violations against children continue to be committed on such a massive scale.

Since my last briefing to the Council on children in Syria (see S/PV.6838), scores of them have been killed, injured, maimed, detained, tortured, recruited and forced to witness or to commit atrocities. If not for those

children, then for whom will the Council act? It is my intention to visit Syria and the region in the coming days to assess first-hand the consequences of the conflict on children. I will also reiterate my call on all parties to the conflict to take all possible measures to ensure that children are protected in the course of military operations, and to abide by international law. I look forward to briefing Council members on my findings upon my return.

As I mentioned earlier, new areas of concern for children have emerged and need to be addressed as a priority, including the military use of schools, the detention of children for alleged association with armed groups, and the impact of drones on children. I encourage Council members and all Governments concerned to carefully consider the recommendations put forward by the Secretary-General in that regard. The report also highlights the progress that has been made in the past 18 months with regard to the protection of children in conflict. Though we have made progress with a number of non-State armed groups, this year has brought remarkable success with the Governments concerned. I very much doubt that this would have been possible without the support of the Council. Those Governments have accepted the framework that has been put in place by the resolutions of the Council and have engaged with the United Nations on measures to enhance child protection in conflict. One indicator is the growing number of inter-ministerial committees established by the Governments concerned to work with the United Nations on children affected by conflicts.

Another indicator is the development of legislation that criminalizes violations against children, as well as regulations and guidelines. In that regard, I welcome the efforts of the Governments of Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Philippines, which have made notable progress during the reporting period. In the same vein, I would like to commend those Governments that have ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict since the most recent report of the Secretary-General, in April 2012 (S/2012/261). Those are most welcome steps towards universal ratification, as intended by the Zero Under 18 Campaign.

Additionally, there has been progress with regard to the engagement of regional organizations on the issue of children and armed conflict during the reporting period. NATO has adopted child-protection guidelines, including training materials prepared with the United Nations for constituent troops and partners. Cooperation with the African Union is ongoing; my Office recently obtained a preliminary agreement to secure child-protection expertise within the Peace and Security Department. I also look forward to further strengthening our cooperation in mainstreaming child protection within the African Union and its regional peacekeeping activities, such as in Somalia or in the context of actions against the Lord's Resistance Army.

In 2004, the Council unanimously requested all parties listed in the annexes to the report of the Secretary-General to enter into dialogue with the United Nations to prepare and implement action plans as a unique tool to put an end to violations against children. In 2012 alone, four action plans to end the recruitment and use of children were signed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan. In addition, in line with resolution 1882 (2009), an action plan on the killing and maiming of children was also signed with the Government of Somalia, and provisions on sexual violence against children were included in the action plan signed with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I would also like to inform the Council that the Government of Chad has redoubled its efforts towards full compliance with the action plan signed in 2011.

It is worth noting that all of those action plans were signed with Governments to put an end to violations committed by their armed forces. That allows the United Nations to support those Governments not only in identifying, releasing and reintegrating children present in their ranks, but also in building their capacities, enacting more adequate legislation and preventing further violations.

Thanks to the Council's efforts, we have reached a seminal moment in the history of that mandate. I am happy to announce today that all armed forces listed in the annexes for recruitment and use of children have entered into an action plan process. Six have already signed an action plan, and the remaining two are in the final stages of negotiation.

One of the key objectives of that mandate — the end of the recruitment and use of children by armed forces — is finally within reach. In that regard, with the support of the Secretary-General, my Office will be launching a campaign aimed at ending the association of children with State armed forces in armed conflict by 2016. The campaign's objective will be to galvanize the efforts of concerned Governments, interested Member States and the United Nations system to turn the page on the recruitment and use of children by Government armed

forces in armed conflict in the next three years. That is an unprecedented and ambitious initiative that therefore needs our full attention. UNICEF and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights have already agreed to join the campaign. In the coming weeks, I will reach out to other United Nations partners. I count on Council members to support those efforts as well.

Before concluding, I would also like to stress that my Office has continued to receive enormous support from its partners since the creation of the mandate. I would like to commend the invaluable contribution of our trusted operational partners, including those here today. From the very beginning, the Council requested that child-protection expertise be included in peacekeeping missions in order to mainstream the issue of children and armed conflict. Since then, more than 100 child protection advisers have been deployed to carry out that agenda in peacekeeping contexts. In the light of the immense protection concerns affecting children in conflict, the deployment of child-protection advisers must not only continue but also grow. In that regard, I call on Council members to ensure that provisions for the timely and adequate deployment of child-protection advisers be included in all the relevant United Nations peacekeeping, peacebuilding and political missions.

The role of UNICEF cannot be overemphasized. Its efforts continue to make this agenda a reality in the field. Its work in ensuring that children formerly associated with armed forces and groups are reintegrated and rehabilitated is also critical. I will continue to advocate for ensuring that UNICEF and other partners have the support necessary to carry out those tasks. I began my statement today by stressing that notable progress had been achieved. However, we must not be complacent. The time has come to reflect on what works. Dialogue with non-State parties, engagement with concerned Governments, a focus on capacitybuilding, and the Security Council's strong commitment have yielded significant results for children. I would like to conclude with an appeal. The child-protection agenda has made progress because eight years ago the Council took a firm stand with resolution 1612 (2005) and expressed its willingness to take all the necessary measures to ensure that children will be protected, in all contexts, from the consequences of war. Children in armed conflict need to know that the Council is listening and that all victims will receive the necessary protection. Perpetrators must also receive the strongest possible signal from the Council that their crimes will not go unpunished and that impunity will end. I call on the Council to continue to unite in that endeavour.